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More activity vowed for Senate committee on foreign relations

By Thomas D. Brandt
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The new chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said yesterday that uncertainty about the use of force is a prime problem with current U.S. foreign policy.

Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., said the Vietnam War "shattered our will to employ force anywhere in the world."

In what his office promoted as a major foreign policy address at the National Press Club yesterday, Mr. Lugar said the committee under his chairmanship "is about to enjoy an extraordinary period of ... achievement." He said his first goal would be to seek "an American consensus" for an achievable foreign policy.

"Questions about commitments and the proper use of force must be resolved in the coming years and strengthen the heart of American foreign policy," Mr. Lugar said.

Mr. Lugar also said it was imperative that South Africa bring its majority black population into its political system to avoid a civil war that also would be "a disaster for the Western world."

However, he said he did not know what steps or sanctions the United States should take. "I frankly don't know what is persuasive," he said.

The chairman was selected in December after he lost a bid to be majority leader in a highly contested, five-way race that put Sen. Robert Dole, R-Kan., in that position. Mr. Lugar's aides believe moves by the conservative Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., prevented some centrists from voting for Mr. Lugar for majority

leader because they wanted to prevent Mr. Helms from heading the foreign relations committee.

The issue was still on Mr. Lugar's mind yesterday when, in his prepared remarks, he said, "Although it was not a chairmanship that I sought or could have predicted would come to me through the decisions of others, I have tried to answer questions about my new role with cheerfulness and courage."

Mr. Lugar's comments about the committee's higher profile was apparently in reaction to the view that under the last chairman, Sen. Charles Percy, R-Ill., who was defeated in the November elections, the panel had played a diminished role in formulating U.S. foreign policy.

Though Mr. Lugar has scheduled hearings starting next week with a number of present and past leaders of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, he has signalled so far that he will be a strong supporter of President Reagan's foreign policy.

On Jan. 31 the committee will hear from Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Later sessions will include former secretaries of state Alexander Haig, Cyrus Vance and Dean Rusk and former national security adviser Richard Allen.

"These hearings will, I believe, establish the committee as a place where the future of American foreign policy will be debated," Sen. Lugar said.

Mr. Lugar's speech was not a hawkish call for a renewed use of force in U.S. foreign affairs but a call for an examination of where it may and may not be appropriate.

"In poll after poll, Americans express their concern about hostile governments which imperil our interests in Latin America and elsewhere," he said.

"But in these same polls, Americans display an equal and overwhelming opposition to any course of action which might actually frustrate governments which are harmful to us," he added.

Answering questions later about U.S. funding for the "Contras," guerrilla forces seeking to overthrow the Marxist-led government of Nicaragua, Mr. Lugar said the United States needs to find another method of pressuring the Nicaraguans.

He said Congress was unlikely to approve more funds for the Contras. Those funds have been provided through the CIA in a covert program that is now well known. He added that some factions within the Nicaraguan government are sending signals that they could accept some American conditions for peaceful coexistence, such as a prohibition of destabilizing Soviet military facilities and an end to support for leftist insurgents in neighboring nations.

Mr. Lugar said overt funding for the Contras was not likely either because that could be comparable to declaring war on Nicaragua, which most Americans would not support.